

The Migration and Entrepreneurship International Conference University of Birmingham

Event Report, 14th April 2016

The Migration and Entrepreneurship International Conference was held at the University of Birmingham on the 14th of April 2016. The event was sponsored by [DiasporaLink](#) and the [European Commission](#) and organised by the [Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship \(CREME\)](#) at [Birmingham Business School](#) in collaboration with the [Institute of Advanced Studies \(IAS\)](#), University of Birmingham. The conference brought together the world's leading scholars in the field of migration and ethnic entrepreneurship, such as. [Prof Ivan Light, University of California, \(University of California, USA\)](#), [Prof Alejandro Portes \(Princeton University and University of Miami, USA\)](#), [Prof Honig, McMasterUniversity](#); and [Prof Monder Ram](#), University of Birmingham. The event attracted researchers and practitioners with a common interest on the subject.

'This is a great opportunity to put our subject and passion right at the heart of the matter of entrepreneurship and immigration' ([Prof Monder Ram](#))



The event outlined important developments in the field of transnational entrepreneurship and migration studies as well as providing the opportunity for critical engagement and reflections on how research can make a difference in support the migration process and breaking down the barriers for ethnic entrepreneurship. Furthermore participants were invited to discuss the challenges and emerging trends in the literature on migration and ethnic entrepreneurship.

This report presents the main themes from the presentations and outlines directions for future research.

1. The challenges of migration from a sending country vs receiving country perspective

Migration is an important concern for contemporary societies and affects both sending and the receiving countries. In his discussion on transnationalism and immigration, [Prof Alejandro Portes \(Princeton University and University of Miami, USA\)](#), observed that migration is an aspect of the social life that acts as a double-edged sword. It has often been blamed for depopulating entire regions and creating systems of social and economic inequality.

But this social flow can also have many advantages for sending countries and more research on these effects is starting to appear.

‘Europe has been and always will be a place of migrants. This is one of the reasons why migration is a central issue of social and political debates’ ([Prof Honig, McMasterUniversity](#)).

Although previously overlooked, migrant remittances are emerging as a potential solution to the problem of poverty in the countries of origin. Either due to nostalgia, obligations or emotional attachment, many immigrants are committed to maintaining ties with their home countries while seeking to repay what they perceive as a moral ‘debt’. Moreover the governments of the home countries have realised the crucial importance of migration remittances for reviving their economy and are making sustained efforts to support and encourage these transfers through diaspora engagement policies.

Furthermore [Prof Benson Honig \(McMaster University, Canada\)](#) signalled the research potential of the current Syrian refugee crisis for

academics and policy makers and invited them to explore the opportunity of conducting longitudinal studies of the same population in different contexts. He concluded by underlining the importance of creating a welcoming environment which would in turn diminish discrimination and xenophobia for a better inclusion and ultimately assimilation of the immigrant population.

2. Transnational Entrepreneurship and lifestyle choices

Transnational entrepreneurship (TE) is a reality of the evolving global economic landscape and the new political social order. The importance of research on TE resides in its ability to shift the public opinion from immigrants seen as labour and accused for ‘stealing jobs’ from the domestic population to migrants being regarded as entrepreneurial and therefore responsible for ‘creating jobs’ and stimulating the economy. [Prof Ivan Light \(University of California, USA\)](#), a true pioneer in the field of migration and entrepreneurship, observed that TE is not just a business but a lifestyle as it involves the whole person and often the decisions are motivated by emotional rather than financial factors. Nevertheless the TE lifestyle has been identified as wasteful and unpleasant and often associated with difficulties in accessing suitable social capital, overcoming cultural and language barriers, insufficient monetary gains, emotion exhaustion and lack of adequate business partnership opportunities. Some of the solutions proposed to overcome these challenges are related to the creation of functional transnational collaboration through migrant networks and Diasporas. On the other hand TE can offer important compensation and entrepreneurs are deliberately choosing

this lifestyle because it gives them access to many of the benefits available in developed country such as better education, infrastructure and overall superior living conditions.

3. [New research on mixed embeddedness and ethnic entrepreneurship](#)

[Prof Benson Honig \(McMaster University, Canada\)](#) discussed about the importance and demographics of ethnic entrepreneurship in Canada while comparing it to research data available for other developed English-speaking countries (USA, Australia and UK). Furthermore he underlined the importance of regional and national contexts on shaping entrepreneurship in different locations even within the same national borders.

[Prof Frederick Wherry \(Yale University, USA\)](#) introduced the notion of relational accounting. Originated from Zelizer's work on social accounting (1989), this issue has recently gained importance in the context of the revival experienced by the social means of money. Relational accounting explores the way in which social ties affect how business owners organise and keep track of their financial accounts. Prof Wherry explained that social relations influence accounting and can sometime act as disruptive forces in managing entrepreneurs' financial choices. The monetary decisions are relational and take meaningful social ties into account, they are also socially oriented and hold collective moral concerns. The discussion also touched on matters related to budgeting concerns of ethnic minority firms, difficulties in accessing financial capital as well as the challenge of managing

unexpected cash flows and uneven expenses. Finally Prof Wherry talked about the importance of rotating credit associations for EMBs and observed that some of the most successful entrepreneurs seem to be using a 'mix and match' strategy between different business sectors and approaches to accessing and employing financial capital. The further development of this model could lead to better policy developments to support the ethnic firms.

The day ended with the launch of the book edited by Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, entitled 'The state and the Grassroots – Immigrant Transnational Organisations in Four Continents'. The discussion was initiated by [Dr Shahamak Rezaei \(Roskilde University, Denmark\)](#) with a brief summary of the book and followed by reflections from [Prof Leo Paul Dana \(Montpellier School of Business, France\)](#), [Prof Thomas Cooney \(Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland\)](#) and [Dr Yipeng Liu \(University of Birmingham\)](#). During the panel discussion the participants debated on issues related to TE, migration and ethnic entrepreneurship in the Irish and Chinese contexts.

Next steps:

1. Establishing an active transnational network of scholars working on this area through the Diasporalink project
2. Opening venues for new collaborations within the network of researchers working on this agenda

For more information about Diasporalink and the institutions part of this research consortium check the project website: <http://diasporalink.org>

For more information about CREME, check the project website <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/creme/index.aspx> and contact Sophie Sinclair: s.c.sinclair@bham.ac.uk

